Meeting High Expectations

By Dawn Danner, Director of Developmental Services

Improve the quality of life for those with disabilities is an honor and a privilege, and one that my staff and I do not take lightly. I recently celebrated my two-year anniversary as Director of Developmental Services (DS), I have been reflecting on the high level of care and customer service we provide. I am extremely proud to lead a team of over eighty people who are dedicated and passionate in the work we do each day. Whether it is the smile and pleasant greeting that you get when you walk through our door or the laughter you hear bubbling up from our consumers – the DS environment at UCS is a happy, team-oriented, and exceptional place to be.

Over the past two years, my expectations for the care we provide to those with Intellectual Disability and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder have been very high. My team and I ensure that people of all ages and all walks of life get the supports and services they need to be happy, healthy and included members of their community. Staff in DS understand that those with disabilities deserve and have the right to live the lives they choose without judgement, bias or limitations. We know our consumers can succeed and reach their goals and we love coming to work each day and helping them try.

In the world of Developmental Services, it is often the small things that bring the greatest rewards. A small reward might be the young man of 21 diagnosed with Autism who found our facility to be very loud and noisy. As such, he spent several days with his ears covered rocking back and forth. After some time, he is now engaging and able to participate in groups and he talks freely with his peers.

Perhaps those rewards come in unexpected ways with people we did not know we needed. We currently serve a 51-year-old man diagnosed with an Intellectual Disability...
and Alcoholism who has tried living independently for many years, with no success. After being evicted from yet another apartment, he had nowhere to go and ended up at the Homeless Shelter. Now, four months later, he is living with a Shared Living family who helps him with his addiction and makes him feel like he has a home. He has formed a very close bond with the other consumer living in the home and the two are enjoy many outdoor activities together.

And sometimes, those with disabilities are able to reap great rewards they never thought possible. One of our consumers, age 26, was non-disabled at birth but became intellectually and physically disabled as a young adult. She was put into a nursing home at age 20 and later became a resident of one of our group homes. When I met her five years ago, she was completely wheel-chair bound. She has moved out of the group home and is living with a Shared Living family. Today, I saw her walk into our building with staff only holding on to her gait belt. They proceeded to tell me that that they had just come from playing basketball.

If we can help even just one person earn those types of rewards, then we will have done our job to improve the quality of life of those we serve. Robert Hensel, a well-known advocate and role model for those with disabilities was born with Spina Bifida. He said: “There is no greater disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more.” Robert is also the Guinness World Record Holder for the longest wheelie done in a wheelchair. How far did he go? 6.178 miles.

When we set high expectations for ourselves and for those we serve, it can only lead to bigger and better things. I believe that only positive changes can come from holding ourselves, our staff, and those with disabilities to very high standards. I hope you believe the same, because you never know how far that wheelie will take you.

DS Consumers skiing this past winter and a group outing to Crown Point.

IN THE NEWS:

UCS Celebrates Staff and Community Members

On Wednesday, June 20th 230 United Counseling Service staff members from programs across the agency including
Developmental Services, Early Childhood Services, Mental Health Services came to celebrate individual staff members achievements and agency wide accomplishments from the past year.

The agency had many achievements to be celebrated, including earning a three-year designation as a “Center of Excellence” from the Vermont Care Partners. UCS is one of only two designated agencies in the state to be awarded this measure of excellence.

Sara George, a UCS Client opened the celebration by welcoming staff and talking about her experience at UCS. She spoke about how Developmental Services staff helped her become more independent, confident and outgoing. “My UCS team has helped me with budgeting my money, joining peer groups, working on job skills, managing my meds, and working on becoming my own guardian. My dream is to live on my own again someday.” Sara said.

This year UCS celebrated the introduction of “UCS Presents”, a series of community engagement and educational events that were hosted throughout the year. The first event was the showing of the documentary “Beyond Silence” presented at Old Castle Theatre this past fall. The film tells the story of three individuals with mental illness and their journey through recovery. A facilitated discussion by Dr. Alya Reeve, UCS Medical Director followed the film. “The response and engagement of the community at Beyond Silence told me that we were on to something, that the community was ready to learn about mental health, to help decrease stigma and to support their neighbors. “said Executive Director Lorna Mattern. “We are thrilled to be able to offer community members more about what we do at UCS in addition to opening a dialogue about other subjects that are relevant to the community, including addiction.”

Two Community Awards were presented as well. Dr. Lloyde Scott was awarded The Archie Warner Memorial Award. This award is presented to an individual or organization that has made a significant contribution to our children’s programs. The Bennington Rescue Squad was awarded The Cleveland and Phyllis Dodge Community Service Award which recognizes a community organization or individual whose service to our clients are notable. Forest Weyen, Executive Director of Bennington Rescue Squad accepted the award on behalf of his staff. He received a standing ovation for all the work the organization does for the Bennington Community.

“It was an absolute honor for Bennington Rescue Squad to receive the 2018 Dodge Award. The EMS Professionals at Bennington Rescue have embraced the emerging trends where Emergency Medical Services is not just emergency work, but a part of the entire healthcare continuum. The real winners are the patients that have had such better outcomes and a better standard of living because of this partnership between UCS and
Bennington Rescue. We are so grateful to receive this award, and look forward to everything UCS and BRS will be able to achieve in the months and years ahead," said Weyen.

Multiple awards were handed out to staff members for their achievements including UCS Quality Team Award, Staff Service Awards, Gerritt Kouwenhoven Staff Development award, UCS Excellence awards and the Peter D. Scully Award. Employees were also recognized for licensures, certifications and college degrees earned during the year.

As the celebratory luncheon came to an end, Lorna Mattern left her staff with this, “Let me say that I continue to be inspired by you and thankful for the excellent service all of you provide to our community.”

UCS Staff following the luncheon and UCS Recipients of the Team Award.

Go the Distance Raises $2,000 for UCS Client Wellness Fund

More than 100 runners participated in United Counseling Services's 8th annual Go the Distance 5K run on Sunday, June 10th, raising more than $2,000 for UCS Client Wellness. The run was held just before Southwestern Vermont Medical Center's Community Day, which celebrated the hospital's 100th birthday.

The first three place runners were Carson Thurber, Nikki Harrington and Harrison Kimball. Andrea Malinowski lead a pre-race Zumba warm up and a Kids' Run Fun with 25 participants followed the 5K.

"Thank you to everyone who participated in Go the Distance," Lorna Mattern, United Counseling Service's Executive Director, said in a release. "This event is a great way to bring people together and build on our mission of building a stronger community by empowering individuals and families to live healthy and meaningful lives."
Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start Participated in Farm to School initiative
By Tonya Havens, Head Start Site Coordinator

Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start attended the Farm to School (FTS) institute in June 2018. This is the first preschool program to be included in this initiative. While we were there our team developed a comprehensive Farm to School Action Plan that includes curriculum, local procurement, family and community connections and outdoor learning spaces.

At Head Start/ Early Head Start we are going to be incorporating Farm to School initiatives into our curriculum and provide students with experiential learning opportunities such as farm visits, garden-based learning, and composting.

We would like to implement: taste testing, cooking projects that are more in-depth and hands-on for both Head Start and Early Head Start, connecting more with families (sending home recipes, giving information about the foods that the children are leaning about, possible field trip to the farm for parents), Farm to School weekly activity, i.e.: Harvest of the month curriculum.

We will also be adding Farm to School into the parent and family events that we offer. To learn more about our Early Childhood Services visit ucsvt.org or call (802) 442-3486.
MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

Sometimes first aid isn't a bandage, or CPR or calling 911. Sometimes first aid is YOU.

Each year millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental health condition. 1 in 5 Americans will be affected by a mental health condition in their lifetime and every American is affected or impacted through their friends and family. Therefore, it is likely that an individual will come in contact with someone experiencing a mental health crisis in the community. Mental Health First Aid Training is an eight-hour course that teaches participants to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and drug abuse—including temporary or undiagnosed mental health concerns and crises.

UCS will be holding Mental Health First Aid Training on Tuesday and Wednesday, August 28th and 29th from 12:30 to 4:30pm. The cost is $40 and space is limited. To reserve a spot contact Amie Niles at aniles@ucsvt.org or call (802) 445-7442.

This event is free and open to the public. Please register online at https://ucspresentsthesword.eventbrite.com/
UCS Presents: The S Word

with a discussion to follow facilitated by
Dr. Alya Reeve, UCS Medical Director
Co-hosted by Manchester Community Library

Wednesday, September 5th
from 6:00PM-8:00PM
Manchester Community Library
138 Cemetery Ave, Manchester Center, VT

Adult Mental Health First Aid
August 28-29, 2018

UCS Presents: The S Word
September 5, 2018
The Barn Sale
September 22-23, 2018

UCS Super Hero 5k
November 3, 2018

For more information on our upcoming events visit www.ucsvt.org.

5K SUPERHERO RUNWALK
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2018

This race benefits the Client Wellness Fund at United Counseling Service. For more information or to register visit ucsvt.org or call (802) 442-5491.

Register for the Superhero 5K now at UCS Superhero5K

Help us build a stronger community.

We would love to hear from you. Has UCS impacted your life? If you have a story you would like to share please contact Heidi French at hfrench@ucsvt.org.

This year support from our donors is absolutely vital in ensuring that we continue to meet the growing needs of our community. Please consider making a donation to our annual fund. Your donation makes a
difference and with your help we can build a stronger community!

Donations can be made to:
United Counseling Service
PO Box 588
Bennington, VT 05201
or call us at (802) 442-5491 ext. 313

Donate Now

United Counseling Service provides Bennington County with nationally recognized community-based mental health and human social services for children, adults, families, and seniors with the mission of “Building a stronger community by empowering individuals and families to live healthy and meaningful lives.” Visit www.ucsvt.org to find out more.

Are you interested in a career with a great organization?
Check out current openings
with United Counseling Service at UCS Careers.

Visit our website